

Funnell, S. C., and Rogers, P. J. (2011). *Purposeful Program Theory*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass. 550 pages.

*Reviewed by Isabelle Bourgeois*

Theory-based evaluation (TBE) has been garnering increased attention in Canada in recent years. Although this is not a new approach to evaluation, there seems to be a renewed interest in making program theory a fundamental component of evaluative inquiry, well beyond logic modelling. Funnell and Rogers provide a compelling and thorough introduction to program theory and its use to various stages of program development, monitoring, and evaluation.

The book is organized in five major sections, each focusing on a different stage of program theory development and use. The first section provides an introduction to program theory that is particularly well-suited to new evaluators or program managers; the first chapter presents a simple example to illustrate the advantages of using program theory. The authors are very clear in their messaging, however, that program theory is not meant to form the basis for entire evaluation designs: “By itself, program theory clearly does not provide guidance on gathering the evidence for monitoring and evaluation; it needs to be combined with evaluation expertise to draw appropriately from methods for research design, data collection, and data analysis” (pp. 39–40).

The second and third sections represent the more pragmatic components of the book and focus on scoping the intended uses and specific components of the program theory. Detailed guidance is provided on developing and representing a program theory and includes an in-depth discussion of the differences between a theory of change (including the outcomes chain) and a theory of action, both necessary components of a program theory. Considerable attention is given to the production of logic models, which may be helpful to newer evaluators. However, the authors tend to favour certain types of logic models over others, which could be confusing to the less-initiated; for example, the pipeline logic model tends to be shown as overly complicated and inappropriate to the representation of the outcomes chain, which is not always the case.

The role of program stakeholders is also discussed extensively in these sections of the book, and concrete advice is provided on how best to involve them in the development of program theory and how best to meet their needs to foster its use. A key insight by the authors is that program theories have limited lifespans and need to be revisited from time to time, as new stakeholders come on board or as the environment of the program changes. The emphasis put here on the process rather than the final product is critical to the development of useful program theories that have the potential to be integrated into program monitoring and evaluation efforts. Too often we see large amounts of time spent on developing a program logic model or theory, only to see it left unused because it is not timely. Also noteworthy in the third section is the potential role of program theory in horizontal (i.e., multiorganizational) evaluation, and its use for developing evidence-based policy.

Although the first three sections provide practical guidance and advice best suited to new evaluators or program managers, the fourth section is more likely to appeal to experienced evaluators or social scientists. The chapters included in this section focus on research-based theories of change, program archetypes, and logic model resources, which can help the evaluator ground a program theory within a broader context. These resources are provided as heuristic devices and are meant to prevent evaluators from starting fresh every time they work on a new program theory. One of the great potential contributions of this book is that it broadens thinking around logic modelling and program theory by discussing the importance of knowing and understanding these general theories of change and program archetypes. Such resources are not commonly found in evaluation textbooks, and can be immensely helpful when working with program stakeholders and when identifying sources of data that can be brought in as evidence in the context of an evaluation. By bringing together these three resources, Funnell and Rogers provide their readers with useful, concrete models that can be applied successfully in various settings. In the future, a discussion pertaining to the burgeoning field of data visualization could be added to this section to further provide the reader with enhanced communication tools and resources.

Finally, the fifth section of the book focuses on the application of program theory to the development of monitoring and evaluation plans and also to synthesis and reporting. The authors discuss the issue of causal inference in detail, providing definitions as well as concrete

advice through the presentation of a systematic approach to causal analysis. They advocate the use of program theory for evaluation reporting and contrast this against a reporting structure based on evaluation methods.

Overall, the book provides a comprehensive view of program theory. Key terms are clearly defined and examples illustrate important concepts throughout the chapters; these concepts tend to be repeated in several chapters, to ensure that readers who only consult certain sections gain the same level of understanding as those reading the book from beginning to end.

The book manages to successfully integrate basic evaluation knowledge and more advanced content to meet the needs of various audiences; for example, even though new evaluators might find the discussions around research-based theories of change somewhat daunting, they will likely benefit from the details provided on how to use software packages to develop a logic model. As the reader's knowledge of evaluation and program theory develops, this book can be revisited and will offer something new each time. The summaries and exercises included at the end of each chapter provide useful learning tools and could be used as milestones in the development of an actual program theory. Although the examples provided throughout the book illustrate the key concepts well, it may be most beneficial to read this book with a specific program in mind and to walk through the development of its theory along the way.

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